

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A method of data sharing and linkage between Internet Protocol (IP) telephony Internet-accessible devices, comprising:

a first user of a first Internet-accessible device initiating a data transfer over a first communications link between the first Internet-accessible device, coupled to a first telephony device and usable by the first user, and a second Internet-accessible device, coupled to a second telephony device and usable by a second user;

establishing a second communications link between a first transmit/receive device of the first telephony device and a second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device without user intervention; [[and]]

exchanging a plurality of data packets between the first and second Internet-accessible devices via the second communications link; and

maintaining current identification information between the first and second Internet-accessible devices to allow the second communications link to be continuously accessible by the first and second Internet-accessible devices.

2. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 1, prior to the first user of the first Internet-accessible device initiating the data transfer, further comprising:

the first user enabling a first link feature of the first Internet-accessible device and the second user enabling a second link feature of the second Internet-accessible device.

3. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 8 ~~claim 1~~, wherein at least one of the first and second Internet-accessible devices [[is]] comprises a set-top box.

4. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 8 ~~claim 1~~, wherein the telephony system ~~[[is]]~~ comprises a telephone.
5. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 8 ~~claim 1~~, wherein the first communications link ~~[[is]]~~ comprises a telephone link via the Internet.
6. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 8 ~~claim 1~~, wherein the first communications link and the second communications link are the same.
7. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the transmit/receive devices are able to send and receive voice and data information simultaneously.
8. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) ~~The method of claim 7~~ A method of data sharing and linkage between Internet Protocol (IP) telephony Internet-accessible devices, comprising:

a first user of a first Internet-accessible device initiating a data transfer over a first communications link between the first Internet-accessible device, coupled to a first telephony device and usable by the first user, and a second Internet-accessible device, coupled to a second telephony device and usable by a second user;

establishing a second communications link between a first transmit/receive device of the first telephony device and a second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device; and

exchanging a plurality of data packets between the first and second Internet-accessible devices via the second communications link,

wherein at least one of the transmit/receive devices are able to send and receive voice and data information simultaneously and wherein establishing the first communications link between the

first transmit/receive device of the first telephony device and the second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device comprises:

the first transmit/receive device switching into an analog circuit of the first telephony device and sending a synchronization sequence for receipt by the second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device; and

the second telephony device detecting the synchronization sequence, muting a handset of the second telephony device, and coupling a plurality of telephone signals of the second telephony device to the second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device.

9. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 8, wherein at least one of the first and the second telephony devices comprise telephones.

10. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 1, wherein a format and a content of the plurality of data packets are defined by one or more applications running at one or more of the first and second Internet-accessible devices.

11. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 1, wherein during an exchange of the plurality of data packets between the first and second Internet-accessible devices, further comprising:

communicating a message that the exchange of the plurality of data packets is in progress to the first and second users on the first and second Internet-accessible devices.

12. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A method for establishing a data link between users of set-top boxes and sharing data through the data link, comprising:

establishing contact between the users of a plurality of set-top boxes through a first transmission media;

without user intervention, initiating a data transfer between the plurality of set-top boxes using a second transmission media;

exchanging identification information between the plurality of set-top boxes using a third transmission media;

using the identification information to establish a data link between the plurality of set-top boxes using a fourth transmission media;

exchanging a plurality of data packets between the plurality of set-top boxes over the data link; and

maintaining current identification information between the plurality of set-top boxes to allow the data link to be continuously accessible by the plurality of set-top boxes.

13. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the first transmission media includes a plurality of telephony devices coupled to the set-top boxes.

14. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 13, wherein one or more of the telephony devices of the first transmission media comprises a telephone coupled to a set-top box of the plurality of set-top boxes.

15. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 13, wherein a first telephony device of the plurality of telephony devices coupled to a first set-top box is able to communicate with the plurality of telephony devices coupled to the plurality of set-top boxes using a Public Switched Telephone Network contained within the first transmission media.

16. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 15, wherein the first telephony device comprises a telephone.

17. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 13, wherein a first telephony device coupled to a first set-top box is operable to communicate with the plurality of telephony devices coupled to the plurality of set-top boxes using the Internet.
18. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 12, wherein the second transmission media [[is]] comprises the first transmission media.
19. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 12, wherein the third transmission media [[is]] comprises the second transmission media.
20. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 12, wherein the second and the third transmission medium [[are]] comprise the first transmission media.
21. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 12, wherein the second, third, and fourth transmission medium [[are]] comprise the first transmission media.
22. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 12, wherein the second transmission media [[is]] comprises the Internet.
23. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 12, wherein the second transmission media [[is]] comprises a Public Switched Telephone Network.
24. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The method of claim 13, wherein the plurality of telephony devices [[is]] comprises a plurality of telephones.
25. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein at least one of the plurality of set-top boxes contains a transmit/receive device for the transmission and reception of the plurality of data packets.

26. (CURRENTLY AMENDED)~~The method of claim 25~~ A method for establishing a data link between users of set-top boxes and sharing data through the data link, comprising:

establishing contact between the users of a plurality of set-top boxes through a first transmission media;

initiating a data transfer between the plurality of set-top boxes using a second transmission media;

exchanging identification information between the plurality of set-top boxes using a third transmission media;

using the identification information to establish a data link between the plurality of set-top boxes using a fourth transmission media;

exchanging a plurality of data packets between the plurality of set-top boxes over the data link;
and

maintaining current identification information between the plurality of set-top boxes to allow the data link to be continuously accessible by the plurality of set-top boxes,

wherein at least one of the plurality of set-top boxes contains a transmit/receive device for the transmission and reception of the plurality of data packets and wherein establishing contact between the users of a plurality of set-top boxes through a first transmission media comprises establishing a communication link between a first transmit/receive device of first set-top box and a second transmit-receive device of a second set-top box, further comprising:

the first transmit/receive device switching into an analog circuit of the first telephony device and sending a synchronization sequence for receipt by the second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device; and

the second telephony device detecting the synchronization sequence, muting a handset of the second telephony device, and coupling a plurality of telephone signals of the second telephony device to the second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device.

27. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein the data transfer initiated by a first user of the users of the plurality of set-top boxes occupies the first transmission media used to establish contact between the plurality of users, thereby temporarily halting a voice communication between the first user and the plurality of users.

28. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein an amount and a type of identification information exchanged varies depending upon a security policy defined for the users of the plurality of set-top boxes.

29. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein the identification information exchanged includes acknowledgment information.

30. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein establishing the data link includes exchanging acknowledgment information between the plurality of set-top boxes.

31. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein the data transmitted after establishing the data link includes a plurality of voice packets, thereby bypassing a public switched telephone network.

32. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein the data transmitted after the establishment of the data link over the data link includes one or more of Internet Protocol addresses, Media Access Control (MAC) addresses, e-mail addresses, mailing addresses, television viewing preferences, television viewing history, photographic archives, personal or family activity schedules, address books, websites, audio files, video files, and travel itineraries.

33. (ORIGINAL) The method of claim 12, wherein each set-top box of the plurality of set-top boxes transmits notification of a change in its data link availability to the plurality of set-top boxes to enable the plurality of set-top boxes to access the data link between said plurality of set-top boxes.

34. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A system for the initiation, establishment, and maintenance of a data link between a plurality of Internet-accessible devices, comprising:

a plurality of telephony devices suitable for voice grade communications;

a plurality of Internet-accessible devices each having a first interface to the plurality of telephony devices and a second interface to a corresponding plurality of transmission media;

a first Internet-accessible device of the plurality of Internet-accessible devices having the first interface to a first telephony device of the plurality of telephony devices and the second interface to the plurality of transmission media; [[and]]

a second Internet-accessible device of the plurality of Internet-accessible devices having the first interface to a second telephony device of the plurality of telephony devices and the second interface to the plurality of transmission media; and

a plurality of transmission paths linking the plurality of Internet-accessible devices to the plurality of telephony devices

wherein a plurality of data packets is exchanged between the first and second Internet-accessible devices via a data link established between the second interfaces of said first and second Internet-accessible devices and wherein the data link is continuously accessible to said first and second Internet-accessible devices through maintenance of current identification information of said first and second Internet-accessible devices by said first and second Internet-accessible devices.

35. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The structure of claim 34, wherein one or more Internet-accessible devices of the plurality of Internet-accessible devices ~~[[is]]~~ comprises a set-top box.

36. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The system of claim 34, wherein the first telephony device ~~[[is]]~~ comprises a telephone.

37. (ORIGINAL) The system of claim 34, wherein the first Internet-accessible device is operable for data communication as well as voice communication.

38. (ORIGINAL) The system of claim 34, wherein the plurality of transmission paths includes one or more of an Internet, a Public Switched Telephone Network, a microwave communication system, an optical communication system, a cable communication system, and a radiofrequency communication system.

39. (ORIGINAL) The structure of claim 35, wherein a transmission path of the plurality of transmission paths includes a first cable headend coupled to a first input/output terminal of the first set-top box, and a second cable headend coupled to a plurality of input/output terminals of the plurality of set-top boxes.

40. (ORIGINAL) The structure of claim 39, wherein the first and second cable headends are the same.

41. (ORIGINAL) The structure of claim 39, wherein a transmission path of the plurality of transmission paths includes an Internet coupled to a first input/output terminal of the first cable headend and coupled to a first input/output terminal of the second cable headend.

42. (ORIGINAL) The system of claim 39, wherein a transmission path of the plurality of transmission paths includes a public switched telephone system coupled to a first input/output

terminal of the first cable headend and coupled to a first input/output terminal of the second cable headend.